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Music Review: The Blues Magoos – ‘Psychedelic Resurrection’

Very arguably, the four American bands that best exemplified the “psychedelic/garage/proto-punk” sound of the 1960s that have tried to renew their presence in the 21st century have been The Electric Prunes, Strawberry Alarm Clock, Sky Saxon of The Seeds, and The Blues Magoos. Back in the day, each were essentially one-and-a-half-hit wonders as each had one signature Top Ten hit with less successful follow-up singles.

In recent years, all four of these bands have tried to capitalize on past glories in different ways. The Prunes continued to issue new albums of new material, notably 2004’s *Feedback*. Before his death on June 25, 2009, Sky “Sunlight Saxon” had maintained a long musical career and was about to go on a new tour booked with the Prunes while working with Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins. Corgan also played live with Mark Weitz of Strawberry Alarm Clock (and the now-late Prunes bassist Mark Tulin) in his Sky Saxon tribute supergroup *Spirits in the Sky* later in 2009. SAC had become an on-and-off again touring outfit before their first new album since 1969 was released, 2012’s *Wake Up Where You Are*. In this case, the collection wasn’t really new as every track was a re-recording of old SAC album cuts. Both the Prunes and SAC honored the passing of Saxon by doing new covers of his better known songs, namely “Pushing Too Hard” and “Mr. Farmer.”



Now, The Blues Magoos have also gone beyond reuniting for stage performances and also issued a new album, their first in 40 years. *Psychedelic Resurrection* features three key original members, lead vocalist/keyboardist Ralph Scala, vocalist/guitarist Peppy Castro, and drummer Geoff Daking. All appeared on the band's 1966 debut, *Psychedelic Lollipop*. The new members are Mike Ciliberto on guitar and Peter Stuart Kohman on bass. The album also features cameos by original bassist Ronnie Gilbert and lead guitarist Mike Esposito, the latter also responsible for the cover art on *Psychedelic Lollipop*.

Without question, *Psychedelic Lollipop* was the collection that put The Blues Magoos on the musical map, in large part due to the success of their hit, "(We Ain't Got) Nothin' Yet." Garage rock it was, but psychedelic it wasn't. While the Magoos were among the first to use that term on an album, the track that really was a psychedelic workout was their extended jam of John D. Loudermilk's "Tobacco Road." Happily, the group re-recorded these classics for *Psychedelic Resurrection*, and it's "Tobacco Road" that again gives the Magoos their psychedelic cred.

Likewise, two numbers reworked from 1967's *Electric Comic Book* take us back to the days of black lights and beaded curtains, namely the appropriately titled "Pipe Dream" (banned by ABC when it was first issued as a single) and another psychedelic jam, "Rush Hour" which opens with the chords of "(We Ain't Got) Nothin' Yet." It's all in fun, of course. Back in the day, the Magoos recorded tracks like "Presidential Council on Psychedelic Fitness" and "Subliminal Sonic Laxative." This time around, we get "D Stinko Me Tummies on the Blinko" describing the miseries of indigestion. Well, old timers are taking different drugs than we used to.

The new songs here occasionally point out the joys of still rocking for the fans, as in the simulated live performance of the title song which Castro based on a Ciliberto riff. Scala sings, "This is what we do/We'll take you in a new direction." Well, new if you've forgotten what it was like in '67. Then there's the radio-friendly "I'm Still Playing" addressed to an audience happy to hear familiar sounds from the guys who created them in the first place. And who couldn't identify with the danceable "I Just Got Off from Work" which follows, appropriately enough, "Rush Hour"?

Psychedelic Resurrection, like the original LPs, is only occasionally psychedelic, and there's a poppy polish smoothing over the rawer garage edges of old. But this isn't a collection to take seriously, it's an outing with old friends who enjoy talking about glory days and sounding like what we enjoyed when we were young. I'd love to have been in the studio while the guys were doing this one, even if no one was cleaning their stash on an LP gatefold cover. Then again, maybe they were. . .